



Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union: the relationship between two major strategic partners

*by Carlos Castaneda**

Latin America and the Caribbean, together with the European Union, share strong historical links, values, culture and economic relations, facts which have strengthened the ties between both regions and led to the launch in 1999 of a bi-regional strategic partnership, aimed at helping improve the political and commercial dialogue that was already in place.

From the continent of America, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), comprising thirty-three nations, has become a more visible and influential player, with a stronger presence in the world and with a greater ability to negotiate with international players.

Furthermore, the Governments of the region have demonstrated the central role they have given to the drawing up of innovative programmes, and have succeeded in mobilizing internal resources and in increasing social investment, aiming to advancing towards sustainable and more equitable development for their people.

Despite our vast diversity, we have shown our willingness to focus on policies and programmes that put at the forefront the common interests of the region; one example of this is our strong commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to fulfilling the Paris Agreement on climate change.

These instruments translate into joint challenges that have been accepted as sovereign nations, and which are fundamental for the exchange between countries and regions in the pursuit of achieving the best results to benefit humanity.

In addition to all the shared values previously mentioned, the inter-regional relationship has strong ties both in economic terms and aid for development terms, as the EU is the second largest trading partner and one of the most important foreign investors in the Latin American region of and in the Caribbean.

Nowadays, a response must be given to rapid and unprecedented changes, to which the strengthening of multilateralism is of -utmost importance. That is why El Salvador, in its capacity as Pro Tempore Presidency of CELAC, has been accomplishing efforts to deepen this relationship, having achieved, among others, a successful Second Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union and the CELAC Community, held in Brussels on the 16th and 17th July, 2018.

The slogan given to this meeting was: “Building bridges and strengthening our partnership to face global challenges”, with the priorities of both regional groups focussed on three areas: the Consolidation of multilateralism; the strengthening of the 2030 Agenda for



Sustainable Development and Future Cooperation; working together to achieve inclusive and sustainable economies, trade, investment and productivity.

The firm willingness of participants to face global challenges and to make significant changes in favour of our peoples was likewise acknowledged.

However, in spite of all these progresses, a question must be asked, “How can this bi-regional partnership continue to become ever stronger over the course of time?”

This is precisely what lies at the centre of the initiative, especially when there are internal political and economic circumstances affecting both regions. Facing this as well as future emerging challenges, it is essential to seek out and deepen common ground aspects, protect common interests, and generate debate and political reflection that will allow us to obtain tangible results and achieve greater progress in our actions in response to the development needs of our peoples.

As such, promoting joint positions on topics of interest where we come together at the multilateral forums, establishing programmes for cooperation, the exchange of experiences and the reinforcing of trade relations and investment are therefore effective and strategic means to consolidate this partnership, as they will give it greater unity and strength when faced with global threats.

Thus it is now essential for CELAC and the EU to continue along the road on which they have embarked in order to underpin their collaboration, setting aside their differences and recognising that this partnership will only be strengthened to the extent that political rapprochement in aspects of mutual interest are reflected in tangible decisions that will indeed advance the development of our nations.

***Carlos Castaneda** is the Minister of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador. El Salvador currently holds the Pro Tempore Presidency of the Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States.

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